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RUSSIAN MILITARY COMMAND ASSESSES CHECHNYA OPERATION. On 28 February, a four-day conference opened in Moscow at which representatives of the Russian military and civilian leadership are to assess the performance of Russian troops in "restoring constitutional order" in Chechnya, Interfax and Nezavisimaya gazeta reported. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev rejected as largely unfounded both widespread criticism of the abysmal performance of Russian ground troops and what he termed"populist pronouncements by individual senior military officials" concerning inadequate preparation and planning. In the latter case, he was presumably referring to his rival General Aleksandr Lebed, who dismissed the entire conference as a pointless "show." Grachev said he had held talks with Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudaev in Mozdok on 6 December, at which Dudaev had said his position was hopeless, but claimed he was a hostage of his entourage, and therefore could not comply with Russian President Boris Yeltsin's ultimatum to disarm. Grachev further claimed that Dudaev's forces, which allegedly include up to 6,000 mercenaries from Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Turkey, and the Baltic states, are currently retrenching in the towns of Gudermes and Shali. Col.-Gen. Fedor Ladygin, head of the General Staff Main Intelligence Department, predicted it will not be possible to eliminate Chechen resistance in the near future. However, Chechen opposition Provisional Council chairman Umar Avturkhanov said there will be no large-scale guerrilla war in Chechnya and that resistance to Russian forces would not last for long. -- Liz Fuller, OMRI, Inc.

LATVIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS. Russian Ambassador to Riga Aleksandr Rannikh on 27 February handed over to Latvian Prime Minister Maris Gailis a letter from his Russian counterpart, Viktor Chernomyrdin, Reuters reported the next day. Chernomyrdin promised to help find "a peaceful and conflict-free solution" to the problem of the estimated 2,000 Russian retired servicemen who are still in Latvia, despite agreements signed by Russia saying they would leave by 31 August 1993. Latvia agreed to give the Russian servicemen temporary residence permits until 30 April if they registered by 1 March. Less than half have done so and could therefore be deported. Russia has asked that the retirees be allowed to remain in Latvia until the end of the year so that problems with their resettlement can be resolved. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

LITHUANIAN PRESIDENT IN ISRAEL. Algirdas Brazauskas--accompanied by the foreign affairs and health ministers, three parliament deputies, and 29 businessmen--arrived in Jerusalem for an official three-day visit on 28 February, Western agencies reported. At a welcoming ceremony hosted by President Ezer Weizman, Brazauskas said he was ashamed that some of his countrymen murdered Jews during World War II and pledged to prosecute war criminals. He was confronted outside the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial by dozens of protesters carrying signs reading: "No rehabilitation for Lithuanian Nazi murderers." Brazauskas also met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.